

Poisonous Snakes Out In Summer

By K. H. Sutherland, M.D.
County Health Officer

Poisonous snakes are always observed in certain areas of Los Angeles County at this period of the year. Campers, hikers, and people who live near the hills or in desert areas should be alert to the danger of snakebite as long as the temperature remains in the vicinity of 60 degrees Fahrenheit and above. The only poisonous snakes that inhabit California belong to the pit viper family, which includes the sidewinder and the Mojave and Pacific rattlesnakes. The Pacific rattler is the one generally found in the foothills and mountains, whereas the others are native to desert areas.

Snakebite is always a serious medical emergency, but is particularly so in the case of children and elderly people. The situation is extremely critical when children receive a large dose of venom, as the ability of the body to withstand the poison is in direct proportion to body weight. In the case of elderly or debilitated persons, the body is simply less able to resist the poison. Generally speaking, the larger the snake the greater the amount of venom injected.

The depth of the bite and the place the poison enters the body influences the victim's physical reaction to it. An injection directly into a blood vessel, for instance, may result in sudden death, while bites on the legs and arms are less dangerous than when the face and head are involved. The danger to the victim is also less when the injection of venom is just under the skin rather than into a muscle.

THERE ARE many opinions expressed in medical journals as to the efficacy of various forms of treatment, but all physicians are agreed that the sooner treatment is begun the better it is for the patient.

The amount of activity on the patient's part is related to the rapidity with which the poison spreads throughout the body, so the victim should move as little as possible after the bite occurs. As a matter of fact anything that stimulates circulation should be avoided.

Prompt administration of antivenin is advised, or, in lieu of that, the chilling and immobilization of the affected part for relief of pain until medical aid can be obtained. Whenever possible, it is also recommended that the individual be hospitalized for further treatment.

OTHER FIRST aid measures have been debated at some length. The procedure generally employed in this area, and which is recommended in the Red Cross First Aid Manual, includes cutting and sucking the wound. This is done in order to remove as much of the poison as is possible before it is absorbed by the body.

A cross-cut incision (about 1/4 inch long and 1/8 inch deep) is made through each fang mark and suction started. If no suction apparatus is at hand, mouth suction must be used. This is a relatively safe procedure for the person applying the suction as long as there is no abrasion in the mouth. It is advised that suction be continued for at least 30 minutes to an hour.

If a person is alone when the incident occurs, this same technique may be used whenever possible. The victim should then walk, not run, for help.

RESIDENTS of snake-infested areas should keep free of rubbish, lumber piles and the like where snakes may hide. Since snakes feed on rodents, be sure that the premises are not infested with them.

Whenever snakebite occurs, medical attention should be obtained without delay and first aid measures started as quickly as possible.

A pamphlet on snakebite will be mailed to anyone who sends a card of request to the Division of Health Education, Los Angeles County Health Department, 241 N. Figueroa St., Los Angeles, Calif. 90012.



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